PRESS RELEASES

For Immediate Release

Bay Area Freeways Record Third Straight Year of Reduced Congestion in 2003

Regional Freeway Delay Declined by 18 Percent From 2002 Level

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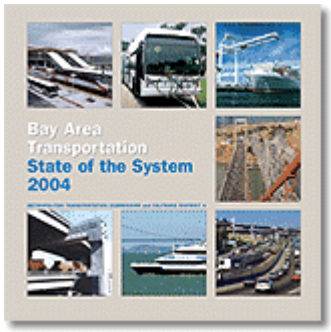

See report

OAKLAND, Calif., January 6, 2005...Traffic on Bay Area freeways flowed more freely in 2003 than in any year since 1998, according to the latest congestion-monitoring data compiled by Caltrans and released today by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). Underscoring both the impact of freeway improvement projects and the lingering sluggishness of the Bay Area economy at that time, the daily number of vehicle hours of delay due to congestion in the nine-county region dropped by 18 percent in 2003, after a 5 percent dip in 2002 and a 12 percent decline in 2001. Among the "Top 10" list of Bay Area congestion hot spots, the morning commute along westbound Interstate 80 from Hercules to the Bay Bridge retained its longtime hold on the top spot in 2003 with an average 6,570 daily vehicle hours of delay.

The congestion statistics are part of the *Bay Area Transportation: State of the System 2004* project spearheaded by MTC and Caltrans District 4. This annual initiative tracks the performance of the region's transportation system and the condition of its facilities. In addition to freeway congestion, the *2004 State of the System* effort also has produced updated information on local roadway, transit and bicycle travel, as well as air travel and goods movement.

The overall decline in congestion also was marked by a shakeup in the annual list of the Bay Area's top 10 traffic hot spots *(see Figure 1 below)*. While the morning slog to the Bay Bridge on Interstate 80 remained the region's most notorious congestion location in 2003, three afternoon commutes moved into the top 10 for the first time. These include southbound U.S. 101 from University Avenue in Palo Alto/East Palo Alto to Shoreline Boulevard in Mountain View (number 7); eastbound State Route 24 from Interstate 580 to the Caldecott Tunnel in Oakland (number 8); and eastbound Interstate 580 east of Livermore to Greenville Road (number 10). Three of the Bay Area's 10 worst congestion locations are now along Interstate 580 in eastern Alameda County, including the eastbound afternoon drive from Hopyard Road to El Charro Road and the westbound morning commute from North Flynn Road to Airway Boulevard (tied for number 3 with 4,320 vehicle hours of delay) as well as the afternoon approach to the Altamont Pass.

All three locations that fell off the top 10 list in 2003 were morning commutes into the Silicon Valley. These include southbound Interstate 680 over the Sunol Grade (which ranked number 8 in 2002 and among the top three from 1998 to 2001); westbound State Route 84 from Newark Boulevard to the Dumbarton Bridge toll plaza (previously number 10); and southbound Interstate 880 from Thornton Avenue to Dixon Landing Road (previously number 2). Delays in these sections likely were reduced not only by the economic chill in the South Bay, but also by several new freeway projects that

came on line in late 2002 or early 2003. Among these improvements are the high-occupancy vehicle lane that opened on southbound Interstate 680 in December 2002; the November 2002 widening of the San Mateo-Hayward Bridge, which attracted westbound motorists who previously crossed the Dumbarton Bridge; and the reconstruction of the Interstate 880/ Dixon Landing Road interchange near the Alameda/Santa Clara County line.

Regionwide, the congestion data show that vehicles typically spent 121,800 hours per weekday in congested conditions (defined as average speeds below 35 miles per hour for 15 minutes or longer) on Bay Area freeways in 2003. This is far below the 177,600 hours per day recorded in 2000 at the height of the region's technology-charged economic boom.

"These figures present a snapshot of where we were in 2003, not necessarily where we are today," cautioned MTC Chair and Marin County Supervisor Steve Kinsey. "But it's clear that freer-flowing freeways are largely a byproduct of reduced economic activity." Noting that recent growth in the Bay Area economy has been accompanied by anecdotal reports of increased traffic, Kinsey surmised that, "When we compile the congestion data for 2004, we may see that 2003 marked a low point for both the economy and for time spent stuck in traffic."

More so than in previous years, the reduction in gridlock was spread throughout the Bay Area in 2003, though declines in congestion varied widely from county to county *(see Figure 2 below)*. Marin, Alameda and Santa Clara counties all registered congestion declines of more than 20 percent, with the biggest absolute drop occurring in Alameda County, where daily vehicle hours of delay fell by 15,000. The largest percentage drop in congestion came in Solano County, where vehicle hours of delay slipped 30 percent to 2,600 last year from 3,700 in 2002. The only Bay Area county in which congestion increased was Sonoma County, where daily vehicle hours of delay climbed 18 percent, from 4,400 in 2002 to 5,200 in 2003.

Reflecting the region's economic upheaval of the past several years, the statistics on freeway delay show a steady shift in the concentration of Bay Area congestion since 1999, with the South Bay and Peninsula accounting for an increasingly smaller share of the area's gridlock. After peaking in 2000, congestion declined steadily in both Santa Clara and San Mateo counties through 2001, 2002 and 2003. For the entire 1999-2003 period, daily vehicle hours of delay fell 37 percent in San Mateo County, 34 percent in Santa Clara County and 19 percent in Marin County, while increasing 5 percent in Alameda County, 23 percent in San Francisco, 29 percent in Contra Costa County, 44 percent in Sonoma County and a whopping 271 percent in fast-growing Solano County.

Highlighting other data gathered as part of the *2004 State of the System* effort: The number of motor vehicle collisions — as well as the number of collisions involving pedestrians and cyclists — continued on a downward trend in 2003. Also trending downward was transit ridership, which fell 7 percent in fiscal year 2002–03, after a 3 percent drop the preceding year. And in an indication that the Bay Area is not keeping up with its pavement maintenance needs, the average pavement condition slipped slightly regionwide in 2003. Detail on these and other categories is available online at the MTC Web site at *<www.mtc.ca.gov/library/state_of_the_system/index.htm>*.

MTC is the transportation planning, financing and coordinating agency for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.

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Figure 1

Bay Area Freeway Locations with Most Delay During Commute Hours, 2003

2003 Rank	Location	2003 Daily in Vehicle Hours	2002 Rank	2001 Rank	2000 Rank	1999 Rank

1	**Interstate 80, westbound, a.m.** – Alameda/Contra Costa County State Route 4 to Bay Bridge metering lights	6,570	1	1	1	1
2	**Interstate 80, eastbound and U.S. 101, northbound, p.m.** – S.F. Cesar Chavez Street to west end of Bay Bridge	4,520	4	4	5	4
3	**Interstate 580, eastbound, p.m.** – Alameda County Hopyard Road to west of El Charro Road	4,320	3	5	13	13
3	**Interstate 580, westbound, a.m.** – Alameda County North Flynn Road to Airway Boulevard	4,320	5	12	14	17
5	**Route 4, westbound, a.m.** – Contra Costa County Hillcrest Avenue to Loveridge Road	3,670	7	15	32	26
6	**U.S. 101, southbound, a.m.** – Marin County South of Rowland Boulevard to Interstate 580	2,980	9	8	6	7
7	**U.S. 101, southbound, p.m.** – San Mateo/Santa Clara County University Avenue to Shoreline Boulevard	2,490	28	44	18	26
8	**Route 24, eastbound, p.m.** – Alameda County Interstate 580 to Caldecott Tunnel	2,470	37	23	22	16
9	**Interstate 880, northbound, p.m.** – Santa Clara/Alameda County Montague Expressway to north of Dixon Landing Road	2,450	6	7	12	5
10	**Interstate 580, eastbound, p.m.** – Alameda County East of Livermore Avenue to east of Greenville Road	2,370	105	36	69	*

Source: Caltrans Disrict 4

Rankings are for routes in which continuous stop-and-go conditions occur with few, if any, breaks in the queue. Thus, corridors that have equally severe delays, but where congestion is broken into several segments, may rank lower in this type of congestion listing.

* No delay occurred on this segment

Figure 2

Daily Vehicle Hours of Delay by Bay Area County, 1999 - 2003

		Daily Vehicle Hours of Delay					Percent Change	
	Freeway Miles (2003)	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**	**2002-2003**	**1999-2003**
Alameda	138	44,300	61,700	65,600	61,300	46,300	-24%	5%

Contra Costa	87	14,500	16,200	18,800	19,400	18,700	-4%	29%
Marin	28	7,700	9,900	7,900	8,400	6,200	-26%	-19%
Napa	5	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
San Francisco	19	9,100	12,500	8,500	11,400	11,200	-2%	23%
San Mateo	73	11,500	18,100	10,900	7,700	7,300	-5%	-37%
Santa Clara	137	36,900	51,700	37,000	31,600	24,300	-23%	-34%
Solano	79	700	3,200	2,400	3,700	2,600	-30%	271%
Sonoma	55	3,600	4,300	4,400	4,400	5,200	18%	44%
Bay Area	**621**	**128,300**	**177,600**	**155,500**	**147,900**	**121,800**	-18%	-5%

Source: Caltrans District 4

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